

Defining the Mission – From Policy Statement to Learning Outcomes

A Triple Case Study of Faith-Based Nursing Education Institutions in Northern Europe

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This article focuses on faith-based nursing education in a pluralistic society. It discusses how faith-based colleges describe their mission and purpose in their policy documents, and how these statements are interpreted in the learning outcomes of nursing education. Three institutions of higher education participated in the study: Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak) (Finland), Diakonhjemmet University College (DUC) (Norway) and Viaa Christian University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands). Two of the colleges, Diak and DUC, belong to the so-called diaconal movement within the Lutheran churches in Northern Europe. Viaa was founded within the Reformed church tradition as an alternative to secular professional education.

This study explores how the three different colleges present themselves and describe themselves as faith-based educational institutions with a Christian affiliation and their particular purpose within the general landscape of higher education. The study shows how the institutions presents faith in their institutional self-presentation and the integration of faith base in learning outcomes of nursing program. This study took place as a case study. As study material we used the strategic documents provided by each college. The study reported in this article is part of a broader investigation of the three institutions, including various qualitative methods such as individual interviews and focus-group interviews.

Translating mission goals and values to the curriculum is most visible in the description of learning outcomes, because those are the more practical and concrete goals of vocational education. Upon analysing the learning outcomes of nursing education within the three universities, it became obvious that the most explicit voice is given to its purpose, which in all three cases focuses on ethics. The study led to the question how best to discuss values and beliefs in institutes of higher education, and who would facilitate, maintain and participate in those discussions.

Keywords: education, nursing, values, Europe, faith, secularization

Introduction and Background

The status and role of faith-based institutions for higher education have undergone major changes over the last decades.¹ Many faith-based colleges were pioneers in the education of nurses and social workers, not only for church

1 James Arthur, *Faith and Secularisation in Religious Colleges and Universities* (London: Indiana Wesleyan University, 2006).

purposes, but also for society in general. They recruited mainly students and teachers who were active believers and managed to combine professional education with training in faith-related subjects. Alongside the changes in the society and the educational context of these institutions, many faith-based educational institutions have withered, while others were gradually transformed into modern institutions in the competitive higher education market. Researchers on faith-based education describe this development as a “generalization” of the institutions and question whether the institutions have “lost their soul” through this process.²

This study explores how three different North-European colleges present themselves as faith-based educational institutions with a specific purpose within the general landscape of higher education. Particular emphasis was put on the connection between the policy statements, self-presentations and the integration of faith-perspectives in study programs and learning outcomes.

Three North-European Colleges

Three institutions of higher education participated in the study: the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak), Finland; the Diakonhjemmet University College (DUC), Norway; and Christian University of Applied Sciences (Viaa), The Netherlands. The project idea emerged from a joint benchmarking project by Diaconia University of Applied Science and Diakonhjemmet University College, focusing on the Christian and diaconal value profile of the two institutions.³ The benchmarking project was initiated and coordinated by Diak and funded by the Finnish Higher Education Council as part of a more comprehensive benchmarking project in higher education in Finland. The benchmarking project revealed that the way in which the institutions dealt with their faith-based mission and was deemed a topic of interest that needed more attention. To broaden the scope of this project, a new partner, Viaa Christian University of Applied Sciences, based in Zwolle, The Netherlands, was asked to participate.

The Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak) has existed for some 20 years⁴, though its roots in diaconal institutions go back more than 140 years. Diak has approximately 3000 students and 240 staff members. It offers degree

2 Perry L. Glanzer, Joel A. Carpenter, and Nick Lantinga, “Looking for God in the University: Examining Trends in Christian Higher Education,” *Higher Education* 61, no. 6 (2011).

3 Ylönen, M., Karvinen, I., Tveit, B., & Fanuelsen, O. E. (2012). Christian and Diaconal Values in Health Care Education—An International Benchmarking Project between Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak, Finland) & Diakonhjemmet University College (DUC, Norway). Helsinki: Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council.

4 In 1990, Finland changed its system of higher education to two types of universities: traditional science universities and universities of applied sciences. To be able to meet the new standards, nine different diaconal educational institutions merged into Diak.

programs in Finnish or in English in Social Services, Nursing and Community, Sign Language Interpreting as well as in Youth, Diaconal and Educational Work. Approximately 40 % of all the students in Diak pursue the so-called double degree, which makes them fully qualified to work in two different fields – either in nursing, social services or youth work and the church (diaconia).

Diakonhjemmet University College⁵ traces its roots back to the 1890s, when the school was established to train and equip young men for the permanent ministry of the deacon in the Church of Norway. Today, the college offers bachelor, masters as well as PhD degrees. Students at Diakonhjemmet are recruited through a general public recruitment system, and there are no additional criteria for the students to enter Diakonhjemmet. The staff are recruited through an open recruitment process requiring mainly academic and professional qualifications. The employer is meanwhile legally permitted to interview applicants about their faith and religious affiliation.

Viaa University of Applied Sciences in The Netherlands is an institution for higher education with roots in the Reformed (Calvinist, Presbyterian) tradition of Christianity.⁶ Viaa University of Applied Sciences offers programs that prepare students for careers in people-oriented, bachelor-degree programs in Education, Healthcare, Social Work and Theology. At Viaa, however, the students and staff members were initially recruited from one particular Reformed denomination. In the first decade of the 21st century the Christian basis of the university broadened, and a new recruitment policy was adopted in 2015.^{7/8} Like every other institution for higher education in the country, Viaa falls under the Higher Education Law of The Netherlands. This law allows the expression of a specific (religious/faith-based) identity in the mission and operations of an educational institute.

Postsecular Language

Today, Northern European countries are often described as the most secularized in the world.⁹ However, secularization does not tell the whole story about Northern European society. In recent years, a new openness toward spiritual and religious aspects of life has appeared all over Europe. The notion of *post-*

5 From 1 January 2016 it merged with three other Christian colleges to become VID Specialized University.

6 Bart Cusveller, "A Calvinist Account of Nursing Ethics," *Nursing Ethics* 20, no. 7 (2013).

7 Policy document recruitment staff members Christian University Viaa 2015

8 This confession was originally formulated in 1567 by Guido de Bres, a Dutch preacher of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands

9 Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, "Uneven Secularization in the United States and Western Europe," in *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

secular society refers to a phenomenon, whereby the often hushed-up voice of religion in Europe has begun to speak again and to re-enter into the public sphere¹⁰. The value and societal importance of religious commitment, such as its organizational potential and the intrinsic qualities of faith-inspired service, are increasingly being recognized.¹¹

The religious voice has returned in a different landscape and with a new language. Unlike in the past, modern European societies are characterized by religious pluralism. The shift from “faith” to “religion” is one of the examples on how language changes. In a survey taken to examine the return of public religion in different areas of society, Furseth documented a tension between various conceptions of religion in public contexts related to ethical and political situations from broader society. She uses the terms “good” religion, “bad” religion and “feel-good” religion to describe this phenomenon.¹² “Bad” religion corresponds often with a more conservative, dogmatic view of faith and religion, while “feel-good” religion represents open, liberal and dialogue-based understanding and practices. Also, within faith-based institutions there has been a shift in language. Aadland and Skjørshammer identifies a change from a language of “God” to a language of “good” in the Norwegian context of diaconia, corresponding with a turn toward an emphasis on values rather than on religion/faith.¹³

Role of Faith-Based Institutions in Modern Society

Besides this development, quite a few scholars state that, if the term faith-based education is to remain meaningful, the faith base of an educational institution should appear in their educational programs. Muntz et al.¹⁴ noted three main virtues that characterize Christian colleges in higher education: integration of faith in the curriculum, building character of students, and the presence of a Christian staff. Arthur pleads for a renewal of critical merits that characterize a faith-based institution. One of these merits, in his opinion, should be the curriculum. A faith-based educational institution should have a philosophy whereby its education, lessons and research is based on faith. Lyon et al. examined two attitudes of integrating faith and learning at religious universities

10 Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, Ein Bewußtsein von dem, was fehlt (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

11 Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

12 Inger Furseth, *Religionens Tilbakekomst I Offentligheten?: Religion, Politikk, Medier, Stat Og Sivilsamfunn I Norge Siden 1980-Tallet* (Oslo: Universitetsforl., 2015), 174.

13 Einar; Skjørshammer Aadland, Morten, “From God to Good? Faith-Based Institutions in the Secular Society,” *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 9, no. 1 (2012).

14 Palmer Muntz and Dan Crabtree, “All Together Different: The World of Christian Higher Education,” *Journal of College Admission*, no. 192 (2006).

and distinguished between an integrationist attitude and a separatist attitude. The integrationist approach means that faith-based perspectives are included throughout the entire curriculum, while a separatist approach includes faith-based perspectives occasionally or in specific modules.¹⁵

In the discussion that connects Christian faith and professional practice, Jochemsen and Hegeman address the ongoing challenge for faith-based institutions to find adequate contents and methods for educating Christian students.¹⁶ They suggest that the concept of *professional practice* could be helpful for faith-based educational institutions. The central idea is that a professional practice is always normative by existing for the realization of a core value that is highly appreciated in society. This high professional standard is realized by a set of quality standards and a code of conduct. Besides these professional values, also personal values, norms and, ethical and religious convictions, and worldviews influence the way professionals interpret practice. They suggest a method for deep reflection, which enables professionals to handle their own attitudes and convictions in practice. Cusveller states that nurses have to cope with conflicts that lie between the norms and values of modern cost-driven healthcare and their own professional responsibility. From that point of view, a faith-based nursing program can help students to contribute to the debate on moral and ethical issues.¹⁷ From a religious perspective, Reimer-Kirkham et al. state that Christian scientists and scholars should be key figures in the critical discussion about the role of ethics and religion. Especially healthcare, where existential questions are continually being raised, demands a respectful dialogue in a world with a diversity of worldviews and religious complexity.¹⁸

Cloke and Beaumont¹⁹ emphasize that, for faith-based institutions, a new focus is emerging in a movement toward focusing on praxis instead of dogma. The same view is also highlighted by Haas and Starnitzke in a recent book that discusses the identity of diaconal and caritative institutions in a society characterized by pluralism. Instead of focusing on church membership and personal beliefs, according to Haas and Starnitzke the task of the diaconal institution is to translate Christian identity into concrete expressions of everyday life.²⁰

15 Larry Lyon et al., "Faculty Attitudes on Integrating Faith and Learning at Religious Colleges and Universities: A Research Note," *Sociology of Religion* 66, no. 1 (2005).

16 *Bridging the Gap: Connecting Christian Faith and Professional Practice*, (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2011), p. 73.

17 Bart Cusveller, "A Calvinist Account of Nursing Ethics," *Nursing Ethics*, no. 7 (2013).

18 Sheryl; Grypma Reimer-Kirkham, Sonya; Terblanche, Landa, "Religion and Ethics in Pluralistic Healthcare Contexts," *Journal of Christian Nursing* January/March 2013, Vol. 30, no. 1

19 Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont, "Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement in the City1," *Progress in Human Geography* 37, no. 1 (2013).

20 Hanns-Stephan Haas, ed. *Diversität und Identität: Konfessionsbindung und Überzeugungspluralismus in Caritativen und diakonischen Unternehmen*, 1st ed., Diakonie; Bd. 14 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2015).

Methodology

The present study was designed as a multiple-case study of the three institutions. The case-study design is an appropriate for studying a current phenomenon in its context.²¹ Using multiple-case study design permits identification of similarities and differences between cases as well as an in-depth analysis when examining each case on its own premises.²² The study reported in this article is part of a broader investigation of the three cases including various qualitative methods such as individual interviews and focus-group interviews.²³ In this particular study, an analysis of written texts or documents was used to investigate how faith-based institutions of higher education currently express their faith-based identity.

Approval to conduct this research was obtained by each institution following national or local policies. In Norway, approval was granted by DUC and the Norwegian Social Science Data Services. In The Netherlands, the research was approved by the University of Applied Sciences in Zwolle. Diak approved the research in Finland.

Central documents from each institution were identified by pairs of researchers at each institution. The selected documents varied somewhat in form and scope depending on the type of documents in use. The intention was to identify contextual conditions that could be relevant to the phenomenon under study rather than to seek homogeneity in the material (Table 1). However, the material from each college comprised overall institutional materials and social media information sources from each of the three institutions (Table 2). Since the particular focus in the study was on the nursing programs at the respective colleges, central documents from each of the three educational programs were selected for further analysis.

The analysis consisted of both within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. At each site, a pair of researchers analyzed the documents and did a separate selection of relevant documents from each institution. This first analysis included obtaining a general overview of the material as well as a classification of documents with the help of an analysis tool (Table 1). When the documents selected were available only in the local language (Norwegian, Finnish or Dutch) and not in translation, the researchers translated relevant paragraphs and sections from each document.

The cross-case analysis of the selected material was performed by mixed groups, including the primary investigators from each institution. In this part

21 Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed., vol. 5, Applied Social Research Methods Series (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009).

22 Robert E. Stake, "Multiple Case Study Analysis," (New York: Guilford, 2006).

23 Bodil Tveit et al., "Balancing Identity and Diversity in Faith-Based Nursing Education: A Case Study from Northern Europe," *Christian Higher Education* 14, no. 5 (2015).

of the analysis, the data were re-examined and classified according to themes connected to the research questions.

Both virtual meetings and live research workshops were held to facilitate contact and discussion among the three partner institutions during the research process. Adobe Connect Pro conferencing technology was used for the virtual meetings as well as a Fronter learning platform for sharing documents. Five research workshops were held in May 2013 and October 2014 in Norway, October 2013 and March 2015 in The Netherlands, and April 2014 in Finland.

Findings

The findings of the study are presented in two categories: faith affiliation in the institutional self-presentation and Integration of faith base in study program and learning outcomes.

Faith Affiliation in Institutional Self-Presentations

Although the three institutions have different ways of presenting themselves in institutional documents, webpages and other information sources, it is not difficult to find statements about institutional affiliation, mission or values linking the institution to a Christian faith-base.

Diak's explicit mission is to educate competent professionals and experts for the society and the church. Diak's particular values is stated clearly in the document Operational Principals:

*The values guiding work at Diaconia University of Applied Sciences are Christian love for one's neighbour, social justice, open interaction and effective work.*²⁴

On the institutional webpages additional values are emphasized such as Diak's *commitment to social justice, solidarity and the empowerment of people*.²⁵ Diak works actively to promote inclusion, citizen participation and public health, and to improve the standard of education by offering adults the opportunity for lifelong learning and improvement of professional skills.²⁶ Diak has a special task to work actively to promote better participation possibilities for marginalized persons and create preventing structures and ways of work-

24 Diaconia university of Applied Sciences, "Diak's Operational Principles" (2013).

25 <http://www.diak.fi/en/aboutdiak/Pages/default.aspx>

26 <https://www.facebook.com/diakamk>

ing.^{27/28} Corresponding values are also expressed as underpinning and guiding the Diak's pedagogy:

*Diak's values form the core of Diak's pedagogy. These values are made concrete through Diak's central pedagogical principles: a dynamic sense of community, experiential-based approach, professional reflection, and development-orientation in our work are the guiding elements in our degree-oriented education.*²⁹

Diak's education provides the student with preparation for international and multicultural roles that focus on fostering equal opportunities for everyone. Diak works closely with its owners and church-related actors.

Diakonhjemmet University College³⁰ defines its core mission and purpose in the strategic plan with a clear reference to the church and the diaconal mission of the church. The mission of the college is defined as follows:

*to challenge and equip for diakonia/service through education to the ministry of the deacon and to educate and do research, rooted in the diaconal tradition and profile, within health, social work, diakonia and leadership ...*³¹

The strategic plan for the college also adds a second mandate to its mission, that from society and the government, where the college is expected to offer education and research of high international quality, and in accordance with the needs in society. The college also contributes to knowledge and research, to development, innovation and value creation.

According to the strategic plan, this so-called double mandate demands an awareness and reflective attitude regarding tensions between the values and anthropology of the institution, on the one hand, and its relevance to society, willingness to act and solve individual and societal problems, on the other hand.³² It is a challenge for the institution "to reflect on the meaning of being diaconal."³³

The study program displayed on the website promises that students will have the possibility to "develop a high value awareness, ethical competence

27 Raili Gothoini et al., *Osallisuutta, Oppimista Ja Arviointia: diakonia-Ammattikorkeakoulun Tki-Toiminnan Vuosikirja 2015*, Diakonia-Ammattikorkeakoulun Julkaisuja. Issn 1455-9927, 60. (Helsinki: Diakonia-ammattikorkeakoulu, 2015).

28 <https://www.facebook.com/diakamk>

29 Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, "Diakpeda" (2013).

30 On 1 January 2016 merged with three other Christian colleges to become VID Specialized University.

31 Det norske Diakonhjem, "Strategic Plan 2014–2018," (Oslo 2013), p. 5.

32 Ibid.

33 Det norske Diakonhjem, "Strategic Plan 2014–2018," (Oslo 2013).

as well as spiritual competence and ability to work in partnership with clients and patients and promote growth and empowerment³⁴.

An analysis of other information displayed on social media shows that the values of the institution are expressed only indirectly through comments and references/posted articles from different event such as for example the welcome speech of the rector.

Viaa University College in The Netherlands is rooted in a specific denomination of the Reformed church in The Netherlands and builds on the relationship between Christian faith and profession in the reformed, biblical tradition. The mission is developed in a so-called identity document of the university³⁵:

The mission statement “When you believe in your work” means that God is the source of the work, that Christian workers are followers of Christ, that they are moved by and concerned with others, and that they seek God’s plan in the work they do.

The identity document elaborates on the mission in four categories: first, the relationship with God as the source of our work; second, the focus on being holistically and integral as a human being in our work; third, being engaged and involved as this brings meaning and purpose to our work; and lastly, that the focus of our work lies in following God’s plan.

The university locates itself consciously in modern society and aims to educate students in a way that helps them to practice their Christian faith in their profession:

The university is a center of expertise. It wants to prepare students in an inspiring and professional way connected to their and our Christian identity. We work within a Biblical framework and stand in our Reformed tradition. We want to develop this identity within the context of our open society and express it in our education and research.³⁶

The mission of Viaa University of Applied Sciences is described in the following headings: reflective professional, normative professional, *bildung* (development of the whole person) and citizenship. They highlight the characteristics in which Viaa is different from other universities.³⁷ In 2014, Viaa started a center of expertise focusing on the “passionate professional” with the aim to support and enable practice and research inspired by the values and the identity of the university.³⁸ This center connects the research faculty of the three departments of the university in a joint research program.

34 <http://www.diakonhemmet.no/DHS/Studiehaandbok/Direkte-publisering/Studiekatalog/Informasjon/Bachelor-i-sykepleie-heltid>

35 <http://www.viaa.nl/~media/Files/Identiteitsdocument%20digitaal.ashx>

36 <http://www.viaa.nl/~media/Files/Organisatie/GH/120427%20Prestatieafspraken%20GH%20definitief%202.ashx>

37 Ibid.

38 Viaa, “Research Policy Statement, Reformed University, 2014,” (2014).

At Viaa Christian University of Applied Sciences, too, online tools are used, including a website, a Facebook page and a Twitter account. The mission and values of the university are stated on the website³⁹.

Integration of Faith-Base in Study Program and Learning Outcomes

The way these institutions for higher education translate their more abstract mission and values into the curriculum is most visible in the specific study program and the description of learning outcomes. An analysis of the learning outcomes in the nursing programs of the three universities provides a picture of how the three institutions manage to integrate aspects related to the specific faith base and diaconal affiliation of the institutions into the specific vocational programs they offer.

Diak's Nursing education is provided according to national and EU level requirements. Studies include both practical training and theoretical studies, and the program includes 210 ECTS credits that can be completed in 3.5 years. Diak has a particular program for diaconal nurses (deaconesses) in addition to the ordinary nursing program. Over the last years, it has become more important for Diak to show specifically how nurses with double qualifications can play a role as active promoters of health and well-being⁴⁰. However, both programs include diaconal studies as an integrated part of their education. The syllabus for the study unit of Professionalism in Health and Church Professions (1st year, curriculum 2010) states as learning outcome that the module student will become familiar with the history of the health and diaconia profession closely interrelated to Diak's history:

The student shall be able ... to know the value basis of Diak and Diak's basic tasks as a part of the educational system⁴¹.

Diak's values and pedagogical principles inform the program in several ways. At Diak, reflection on values and ethics always forms a part of the studies of any topic. To be recognized as full-fledged professionals, students should be able to "prevent, identify, analyze and correct disadvantages present in the lives of those that are the weakest in our society." The learning outcomes include awareness of ethical problems related to treatment and care. A specific unit focuses on values and ethics, in particularly on learning outcomes related to

³⁹ www.viaa.nl

⁴⁰ Helena & Rättyä Kotisalo, Lea, "Diakonissat Terveysten Edistäjinä. Diaconia-Ammattikorkeakoulun Julkaisuja, B Raportteja 58. Diaconia-Ammattikorkeakoulu: Helsinki," (2014).

⁴¹ Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, "The Study Module of Ethics and Values in the Social-, Health- and Diaconal Professions. Diak's Curriculum 2015," (2015).

values and the ethical basis of caring and diaconal work. After completing the course, the students should be able to:

- recognize different world views and concepts of human nature and evaluate their significance in humanitarian work,
- analyze the concepts of human nature and values that affect his or her ethical actions,
- reflect on the ethical responsibility of his or her actions as required by the professions in the field.⁴²

The program places particular focus on the existential and spiritual needs of the patients. One example is the module addressing elderly care (3rd year, curriculum 2010), which highlights the existential and spiritual needs of the senior patient and support using methods of pastoral care:

The student ... shall be able to identify and meet the psychological, existential and spiritual needs of the senior patient and to help him/her using methods of pastoral care ... recognizes the ethical problems related to the care of a senior patient⁴³.

Diakonhjemmet: In the Diakonhjemmet University College, the program describing the bachelor in nursing emphasizes the connection between the institutions diaconal foundation and the nursing program:

Today's nursing education at Diakonhjemmet University College wants to use the diaconal tradition as a base and starting point and as an inspiration, which gives the education a specific characteristic ... the education is rooted in a diaconal value base, which at the same time is characterized by openness and a wide horizon.⁴⁴

In the general learning outcome description of the program, several learning outcomes reflects the value-base of the college. Examples are where it's said that the students at the end of the program:

- has knowledge about and understands the importance of faith/worldview, values and culture for people's life
- shows respect for other people's values and faith/worldview and are able to communicate (dialogue) with people on existential questions and subjects related to faith/worldview.⁴⁵

Learning outcomes in the 13 modules that constitute the bachelor program in nursing to some extent reflect the value of the general learning outcomes. One example is that most practical modules have learning outcomes related to

42 "The Study Module Values and Ethics. Diak's Curriculum, 2010," (2010).

43 "The Study Module in Nursing Work with Aged 2011. Diak's Curriculum 2010," (2010).

44 Diakonhjemmet høyskole, "Fagplan for Bachelorutdanning I Sykepleie, 180 Studiepoeng," (Oslo 2014), p. 4.

45 Ibid., p. 8.

students learning compassionate care, ethical awareness, critical reflection and patient participation. The 10th ECTS module, entitled “Values and Relations in Professional Practice,” has a multiprofessional scope, meaning that students from all professional programs have this module as a part of their bachelor degree. In this module a specific focus is put on ethics, values and relationships as a part of professional practice.

In addition to the obligatory modules, the diaconal profile of the program is explicitly visible if we look at the electives modules offered to the students within the bachelor program in nursing. Among the 8 topics (modules), each of which cover 5 ECTS, 3 are closely related to the diaconal tradition: “*Spiritual Care*,” “*Diaconal and Spiritual Awareness in Social Work and Healthcare*” and “*Diaconia*” are all offered to students who wants a more profound insight into these themes⁴⁶.

Viaa: At Viaa, the philosophy of nursing underpinning the 4-year bachelor program refers explicitly to the Christian faith by stating that human beings are created by the image of God, dependent on God’s grace and responsible individuals. The mission of the faculty of nursing is described as follows:

Our students develop competencies to become bachelors in nursing in connection to their Christian faith.⁴⁷ We want to educate, research and train in an inspiring and personal way, which helps students and professionals to develop themselves to a healthcare professional that is “ready for the future.”⁴⁸

In this philosophy nursing is regarded as a calling, and the program centers around total patient care, i.e., around the human integrating all domains of life, including spirituality.⁴⁹ The education of integral nursing is based explicitly on the theory of the Neuman Systems Model.⁵⁰

In the curriculum of the nursing program, the following values are prominent: to educate competent professionals according to professional standards, to educate professionals who provide human-centered nursing care and integrate physiological, psychological, social-cultural, spiritual and developmental variables, and to educate critical professionals who can reflect on their work from a professional perspective and their own Christian perspective. During the 4-year Bachelor curriculum, students work on achieving these core values.⁵¹

46 Ibid., p. 41.

47 Viaa, “Self-Evaluation Document Accreditation Bachelor Nursing” (2012).

48 “Policy Statement Faculty of Health Care, 2014–2018,” (2014).

49 “Educational Model Bachelor Nursing” (2005).

50 Betty M. Neuman and Betty Neuman, *The Neuman Systems Model*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2011).

51 Ibid.

To develop more specific learning outcomes, the Dutch national competence profile for bachelor degree nurses identifies specific competency aspects (in total 21 aspects), which Viaa translated to modules and courses in the curriculum. These aspects include issues like ethics of care, reflection, awareness of the impact and consequences of the Christian view of life, and responding to a broken and suffering world. They also include aspects like critical thinking and clinical reasoning as well as the practical application of a holistic approach to nursing policy, plans and patient education.⁵²

Becoming a reflective professional is addressed in reflective sessions mainly during internships. Nursing ethics and spiritual care are an explicit part of the curriculum. Ethics and spiritual care are part of the following modules: Chronic illnesses (1st year), Intellectual disabilities (1st year), Acute clinical care (1st year), Psychiatric illnesses (2nd year), Child care (2nd year), Care for the elderly (2nd year). These modules have specific learning outcomes regarding ethics and spirituality. Examples of these learning outcomes are:

- The student can illustrate the role of pastoral care for intellectually disabled people.⁵³
- The student can describe the differences and the similarities between medical ethics and Christian ethics.⁵⁴
- The student can describe the importance of spiritual care in general and specifically regarding patients with a psychiatric disease.⁵⁵
- The student can describe which ethical decisions may appear at the end of life of elderly people.⁵⁶

Discussion

This investigation of the three colleges in The Netherlands, Finland and Norway paints a picture of three institutions and how their faith-based foundations are expressed in institutional documents, self-presentations and in educational programs. Based on our findings it is possible to discuss these institutions using the concepts of “virtues” or “merits” as described by Muntz et al. (2006) and Arthur (2006). For example, one can say that all of these colleges have programs incorporating Christian insights and values in the curriculum and a more or less explicitly declared Christian purpose. At first glance, the Dutch college Viaa seem to be more “orthodox,” while DUC in Norway and

52 Viaa, “Study Guideline Nursing Department Viaa, 2014,” (2014).

53 “Syllabus, Nursing Care for People with an Intellectual Disability, 2014–2015,” (2014), p. 30.

54 “Syllabus, Nursing Care for Intensive Clinical Patients, 2014–2015,” (2014), p. 70.

55 “Syllabus, Nursing Care for Psychiatric Patients, 2014–2015,” (2014), p. 108.

56 “Syllabus, Nursing Care for Elderly People, 2014–2015,” (2014), p. 36.

Diak in Finland tend to be more “intentional pluralist” (Arthur 2006). However, upon going deeper into the data the picture becomes more nuanced.

The Language in Policies and Self-Presentations

An analysis of the institutional documents shows that the three institutions clearly refer to their Christian heritage in the documents. It is interesting, though, that there are differences between the institutions. Diak and Diakonhjemmet are both rooted in the Lutheran diaconal movement, which pioneered nursing education more than 100 years ago. However, they are quite different in the way they express their relationship to these roots. While DUC refers explicitly to the diaconal tradition and the institutions dedication to contribute “to fulfil the diaconal mission of the Church,” Diak present their faith base in terms of values, where one of the values is “Christian love for one’s neighbor.” Viaa has the most explicit expression of a Christian purpose: According to its policy documents, the institution is “committed to educating well-rounded Christian professionals,” and furthermore the work of the institution is referred to as “following God’s plan.”

At the same time, all three institution goes beyond the Christian purpose in their presentations of institutional mission. DUC emphasizes that there is a second mandate adding to the mission, namely, the mandate coming from the societal requirements of higher education: to educate quality healthcare workers with the relevant skills for serving within the society. According to DUC’s strategic plan, it is an institutional challenge to navigate the potential tension between the two sides of this “double mandate.” According to Henck⁵⁷, being accountable to two worlds may create a feeling of “walking the tightrope” for Christian colleges. The strategy for DUC seem to be to put emphasize on value awareness, spiritual and ethical competence as well as accentuating relational aspects of practice. Diak seem to have followed a similar line, highlighting multicultural tasks, commitment to social justice, solidarity and the empowerment of people. In addition, the policy documents of Diak states that the values should influence the pedagogy offered at Diak. Hence aspects such as life-long learning, a dynamic sense of community and professional reflection are emphasized and referred to as pedagogical principles corresponding with Diak’s value foundation. Viaa also uses more general language to describe its mission and purpose, in addition to the explicit Christian language used. The focus on reflective professionals, normative professionals, development of the whole person (*bildung*) and citizenship is linked to the college purpose and identity.

57 Henck, 2011, Walking the tightrope: Christian colleges and universities in a time of change. *Christian Higher Education*, 10 (3/4), 196–214. doi: 10.1080/15363759.2011.577711: p. 196.

All three universities use social media, which has become an important way of communicating both internally between the “members” of the institution as well as to a wider audience. This study shows that, in the digital media, a quite general, not explicitly church and faith-related language seems to be used to express mission, purpose and values. One example is that the relationship to the Church and the Christian affiliation of DUC is not clearly visible on the webpages of the institution. Another example is that all three institutions have developed slogans and mottos that can be interpreted both within a faith framework and within a more humanistic framework. “The Passionate Professional” and “When You Believe in Your Work” at Viaa and similarly Diak’s slogan “Many Ways to a Better World” and DUC’s “Engaged for People” are all likely to have this twin function.

One advantage of focusing on values by using a more general language, instead of a faith language, is that it can be open to a broader adherence than a purely religious language can. This is in line with Aadland and Skjørshammer’s⁵⁸ discussion of the change from a language of “God” to a language of “good” in the Norwegian context of diaconia. A problem with this approach can be that the foundation of the values becomes obscure, leaving it to individual students and staff to establish the link between the values and the Christian foundation of the college.

From Institutional Statement to Learning Outcomes

It is interesting to see the way the three institutions translate their mission and values into the curriculum. This is visible in the specific study plans, courses or modules, and particularly explicit in the learning outcomes described. The learning outcomes are expressions of what knowledge, skills and general competence the students are supposed to have achieved after completing a course/module or the whole program.

An analysis of the three programs shows that there are differences between the colleges in the way they insert identity and faith base into the curriculum. In line with a more “orthodox” statement of the Christian purpose and mission in strategic documents, Viaa has (not surprisingly) the most explicitly Christian “signature” in courses and learning outcomes. Viaa is the college corresponding best with the ideas of Muntz et al. and Arthur on what a Christian higher education program should be.

However, all colleges express the intention that the faith base of the college should somehow influence and inform the whole program. At Diak and DUC this seems mainly to be expressed by emphasizing outcomes such as

⁵⁸ Aadland, Einar; Skjørshammer, Morten. “From God to Good? Faith-Based Institutions in the Secular Society.” *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 9, no. 1 (2012): 83–101.

value awareness and ethical reflection capacity in various modules throughout the program. According to Jochemsen and Hegeman, this may be an adequate way of realizing role and purpose for faith-based educational institutions today as this links to a more general understanding of professional practice as normative. Professional values, including personal values, norms, ethical and religious convictions and worldviews influence the way a professional interprets practice. Hence, these aspects need to be addressed by the education. A particular role of a faith-based nursing program can be to equip students with the necessary competence to identify and meet patients' needs in a context characterized by a diversity of worldviews and religious complexity.

A different approach from this "integrationist" line is to make separate modules or programs for students who are particularly interested in subjects linked to the faith/diaconal foundation. Diak has done this by maintaining the particular program for the diaconal nurses, while DUC created a number of elective modules for students who are particularly interested in a more in-depth focus on subjects such as spiritual care or diaconia.

Maintaining Identity in a Pluralist Context

Offering separate modules for students particularly interested in spiritual care, diaconia and other related topics is one way to deal with internal diversity within the student group. However, an important task for all modern institutions of higher education is to prepare all their students to work and live in the increasingly diverse contexts of our interconnected and pluralistic world⁵⁹. Diversity may be cultural, ethnic, and religious as well as in values and opinions. According to our analysis, the three colleges are all aware of their responsibility to equip all students with competence to meet needs of a diverse population of clients, patients, and family members.

Vught suggests that scarce resources and the strong influence of academic norms and values in the educational system tend to lead to greater uniformity among educational institutions. Findings from the present study indicate that our three colleges at least have managed to put their particular signature on their respective program and carve out a specific role for themselves in the landscape of nursing education. One of the strategies suggested by Vught is that, if they want to survive, faith-based colleges should put more emphasis on the distinctive value base of the program and the uniqueness and added value the college offers. Our study demonstrates that this can be done in various ways. One way is by using a particular Christian language, emphasizing

59 59 Nussbaum, K. B., & Chang, H. (2013). The quest for diversity in Christian higher education: Building institutional governance capacity. *Christian Higher Education*, 12(1/2), 5–19. doi:10.1080/15363759.2013.740383

ing the uniqueness of Christian values and integrating Christian perspectives throughout the program or in separate modules. This is consistent with traditional expectations of what it means to be a faith-based educational institution, though it may prove to be a rather exclusive strategy. Another strategy may be to use a more neutral or general value language, and develop modules and learning outcomes focusing on value awareness and general spiritual and ethical competence rather than on faith-specific perspectives. This is more in line with the viewpoint of Cloke and Beaumont (2013), suggesting the wise strategy of keeping the focus on practice (e.g., how values are lived out) instead of dogma (e.g., the faith that underpins the values), thus preparing students with the capacity to act with integrity in a diverse and pluralist society. The strength of the latter strategy is that it defines the institutions in ways that can be accepted by broader groups. Various combinations of the two strategies is also possible.

Conclusion

The present analysis of the three case colleges from Northern Europe shows that these faith-based institutions and nursing programs, although different in format and thrust, have selected strategies to maintain their identity and define their mission in a pluralistic, secularized society.

Rather than concluding and recommending a common strategy, this research has posed questions and indicated problematic areas. It is important to keep discussions related to identity and purpose alive, to create engagement and dynamic deliberations that are vital to the future and further development of these institutions. Remaining open to differences and heterogeneous positions might prove to be one way to continue to develop and strengthen the identity of faith-based institutions and, hence, to ensure that they continue to be a highly needed source of inspiration of good practice in generations to come.

This study proves that there is a need for further research in the context of faith-based institutions in Northern Europe. Such research should be carried out in order to facilitate the process of self-evaluation at each institution and to map the roles and responsibilities in society at large. International research is useful when comparing institutions, sharing experiences, and investigating possible pathways for the future of these institutions in Northern Europe.

Table 1: Documents and other sources of information

	DIAK	DUC	Viaa
Overall institutional documents	DiakPeda (Diak's Pedagogical Principles)	Strategy plan	Identity document Christian University
	Diak's Operational Principles	Activity plan	Performance indicators of Christian University for Applied Sciences, 2012
		Study catalogue	Policy Statement Academy of Healthcare, 2014–2018
			Self-evaluation regarding healthcare and spirituality, 2012
Social media information sources	Official Facebook page	Official Facebook page	
	Official webpage	Official webpage	Official webpage
Nursing program, curriculums and courses	Implementation Plan 1 – learning outcomes: Professionalism in health and church professions	Study plan/curriculum Bachelor's Degree in Nursing	Self-evaluation report Bachelor of Nursing, 2012
	Clinical nursing work with the aged	Implementation plans for modules 1–13 – focus on learning outcomes in the Bachelor Program	Educational Model Bachelor of Nursing, 2006
			Spirituality and ethical issues implemented in the education program and modules.

Table 2: Introduction of participating higher education institutions

	DIAK	DUC	Viaa
Nationality	Finland	Norway	The Netherlands
Founding year	1867	1890	1972
Size student/staff	3000/240	2300/160	1450/–
Number of cam- puses	5 (2016) Helsinki, Pieksämäki, Pori, Oulu, Turku Helsinki, Oulu, Pieksämäki, Turku, Pori, Kauniainen, Järvenpää	2 Oslo, Sandnes	1
Affiliation with a church	Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church	Church of Norway	Reformed Church
University motto	<i>“Many ways to a better world”</i>	<i>“Engaged for peo- ple”</i>	<i>“When you believe in your work”</i>
Departments/ competency areas	Resources and quality, Growth and expertise, participation and health, Church and society and lead- ership and service systems.	Nursing and health Social work and family therapy Diaconia and leadership Social education and occupational therapy	Healthcare Social work Education Theology
Nursing depart- ment size stu- dent/staff	790/40	500/35	500/ 44
Educational nursing programs	Bachelor of Social and Healthcare (RN) Master in Health and Social Care	Bachelor of Nurs- ing Master in Health and Social Care of the Elderly	Bachelor Nursing (RN) General Prac- titioner Nurse (GPN)
Nursing Research Program	Integrated research program	Integrated thematic research program	Lectorate[don’t know what this means] Spirituality and Healthcare
Duration of Nurs- ing Program	3.5 years (210 ECTS)	3 years (180 ECTS)	4 years (240 ECTS)

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